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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000017

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [UK](#) [KCOR](#)  
SUBJECT: SECURITY - COALITION URGES TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

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CLASSIFIED BY: Louis L. Bono, Director, REO Basrah, Department  
of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. U.S. and British diplomats and the commander of British forces in southern Iraq met on February 21 with 25 sheikhs from the Basrah Tribal Council to encourage them their role in the security process. The sheikhs and the Coalition exhorted each other to take the lead in fighting the militias, offering to support the other. The discussions ended in vague agreements to form tribal and community councils to deal with the issue. End Summary.

2007 A DECISIVE YEAR FOR BASRAH

12. (C) The British Consul General (CG) Rosalind Marsden said 2007 is going to be a decisive year for Basrah, with the transfer of security responsibility from British to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC), the reduction of British forces in southern Iraq, and provincial council elections. The CG declared now that Iraq has a sovereign government, Iraqis must increasingly shoulder the burden to "contain criminals and neutralize radicals." She added that the Coalition would continue to offer support, even after PIC. She encouraged the sheikhs, who command public respect but have been marginalized by the political parties, to support honest, qualified and capable candidates in the coming elections and to hold accountable the local government, which is seen as corrupt in the eyes of the Basrah public.

SHEIKHS SAY BASRAH POLICE SERVE CORRUPT PARTIES

13. (C) The sheikhs, to a man, said that turning security over to the Basrah government would lead to chaos. The Council leader, Sheikh Muzahem al-Kanaan said PIC would remove all restraints on the political parties and their militias. Muzahem, who was governor of Basrah under the Coalition Provisional Authority, said corruption played a major role in the formation of the militias. He said many were formed as money collection agencies and were subsequently harnessed by the political parties during the election campaigns. With other sheikhs nodding and muttering in agreement, Muzahem said the Coalition cannot abdicate its security responsibilities, because it destroyed the old security forces and rebuilt new ones on "a wrong foundation."

14. (C) The British commander, Major General Jonathan Shaw, told the sheikhs that Basrah is no different from Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces, which are functioning under PIC. He added that the tribal leaders must learn to operate within the new democratic framework. He commented that the Coalition forces

lack the understanding needed to stabilize Basrah. "I want to give power to you, because you understand your own people. If you have a plan, I will support your plan," he said. Muzahem took issue with Major General Shaw's assertion that Basrah is no different from the other provinces that have implemented PIC. He said the fight for control for Basrah is fiercer because of the great wealth of the province, and because there is no dominant tribe to impose order in the divided society. He added that Iranian influence in Basrah is unavoidable because of numerous family ties to the Arabs of western Iran, resulting in large-scale movement across the border.

15. (C) The REO director said that PIC is inevitable for Basrah and that ways to work with the unsavory Provincial Council need to be found. Explaining that the power of the Council as a whole is greater than the sum its individual sheikhs, he urged them to band together to influence the process. On security, he posed two probing questions: (1) if the police could be purged of corrupt and violent elements, how do we deal with thousands of armed and jobless men suddenly turned loose on the streets; and (2) if the right people could be found for the senior security jobs, would they be able to control the rogue elements in the forces?

#### SHEIKHS WILLING TO ENGAGE

16. (C) Muzahem suggested three ways that the tribal leaders could help confront the militias: (1) identify an apolitical candidate for chief of police and give him a trial period; (2) strengthen ties with the Iraqi Army, which, Muzahem said, has a higher sense of patriotism and discipline than the police; and (3) form a council consisting of sheikhs, civic leaders, and clerics to advise the Coalition on militia issues. The REO director welcomed the idea and said he was willing organize such a meeting. "The REO will support you in this process" he said, but reiterated "you must take the lead."

17. (C) Comment. The tribal leaders and the Coalition agree on the need to cleanse the security forces of destabilizing

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elements, but both believe the other should take the lead. We will continue to impress upon the sheikhs, clerics, and others the efficacy of their role in stabilizing Basrah. End comment.  
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